

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-100](#), a report to the Honorable Robert Menendez, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Congress established an SIV program in 2009 for Afghan nationals with at least 1 year of U.S. government service, given the risk these employees face. Local staff at the U.S. diplomatic mission in Afghanistan are key to implementing U.S. policies and programs because of their institutional knowledge, language skills, and local relationships. A high rate of Afghan staff resigning after receiving an SIV could diminish the U.S. government's capacity to carry out its mission. GAO was asked to review State's and USAID's efforts to mitigate the loss of Afghan staff.

GAO evaluated (1) SIV-related resignations, including how, if at all, State's and USAID's workforces in Afghanistan have been affected in recent years; (2) the actions, if any, State and USAID have taken to mitigate any effects related to attrition of Afghan staff, including SIV recipients; and (3) the extent to which State and USAID have evaluated mitigating actions related to the attrition of Afghan local staff, including SIV recipients. GAO analyzed data from 2010 to 2015, reviewed documents regarding the Afghan workforce, and interviewed State and USAID officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State and USAID evaluate actions intended to mitigate the effects of Afghan local staff resignations. State and USAID agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-16-100](#). For more information, contact Michael J. Courts, (202) 512-8980 or [courtsm@gao.gov](mailto:courtsm@gao.gov).

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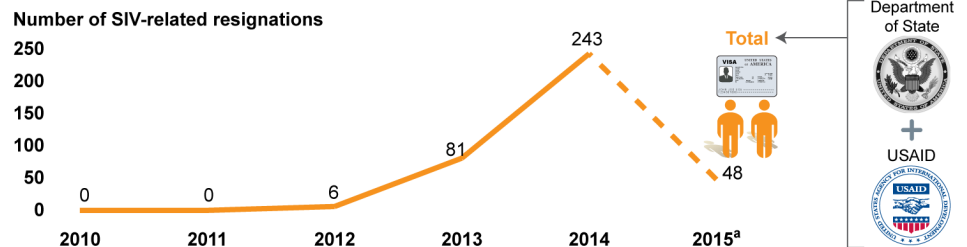
## AFGHANISTAN

### State and USAID Should Evaluate Actions Taken to Mitigate Effects of Attrition among Local Staff

## What GAO Found

Resignations of Afghan local staff at the Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) after receiving a special immigrant visa (SIV) reached their highest level in 2014, and have had varied effects on the agencies' institutional knowledge (fig.). Resignations increased as more Afghan staff began the SIV application process than in the initial years of the program, and as State addressed delays that had previously slowed visa issuances. Afghan staff resignations are likely to be lower in 2015 than in previous years based on the number of current staff that have initiated the SIV process. Based on GAO's assessment of changes to average tenure and grade level of Afghan staff from 2010 until June 2015, and insights from agency officials, the effects of SIV-related resignations on State's and USAID's institutional knowledge is varied. For example, average tenure among both agencies' Afghan workforces decreased slightly. In addition, embassy officials said that local staff attrition may affect some program coordination with the Afghan government. Nonetheless, despite this attrition, agency officials reported that they were successful in identifying qualified replacements to fill positions.

#### SIV-Related Resignations in Afghanistan, Department of State and USAID



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State and USAID data. | GAO-16-100

<sup>a</sup>Data are reported as of June 2015 for the Department of State and August 2015 for USAID.

Agencies have taken a number of actions to mitigate the effects of Afghan staff attrition, including SIV-related resignations. For example, State and USAID temporarily transfer experienced local staff from other diplomatic missions to Afghanistan, and the agencies sometimes fill one position with two employees in anticipation of an SIV-related resignation. In addition, the agencies provide additional administrative support from Washington, D.C., beyond what is generally provided to other U.S. missions, and send U.S. personnel to Afghanistan on a temporary basis to fill staffing gaps caused by attrition.

State and USAID officials said that these agencies have not evaluated actions taken to mitigate the effects of Afghan staff attrition. Officials said agencies have not conducted such assessments because of resource constraints and the reactive nature of operations in such an unpredictable environment. Key principles of human capital management that GAO identified call for agencies to evaluate the contribution that such activities make toward achieving programmatic goals, including those related to the workforce. Without these assessments, it will be difficult for agencies to have information to determine the costs and benefits of actions taken and handle workforce-related needs in challenging environments in the future.